The rise of the occupational hygiene profession in Norway

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Abstract

The title occupational hygienist come in use in Norway first in the 70es, starting with the Norwegian Labour Inspectorate employing academics with chemical or physical background and trained them into the field of Occupational Hygiene. Part of the training was conducted in Sweden. Before, the term "occupational hygiene" mainly was used in Norway to describe the field of Preventive Occupational Medicine.

The first Occupational Hygienist in Norway recognised by the Norwegian Occupational Hygiene Association was Karl Wülfert. He came to Norway in 1928 after he had finished his PhD at University of Munich (Germany) and worked one year in Sweden with the later Nobel Prize Winner in Chemistry, Prof. von Euler. He was from 1931 involved in build up the new fish canning laboratory in Stavanger. In 1947 he become chief chemist at the new "Laboratory for chemical analysis and assessment of exposure in Norwegian working life" in Oslo. This laboratory was the precursor of what later become our "National Institute of Occupational Health". In 1977 we get a new and modern Worker Protection Law, same year the first academic position in Occupational Hygiene was established at the Norwegian Technical University (NTH) in Trondheim. Our first professor was Egil M. Ophus. The year after we got our first OELV list.

The Norwegian Occupational Hygiene Association was established in 1985. Today (2022) the association has grown to approximately 380 members. The number have been stable over the last 10-15 years. The density of occupational hygienists in Norway based on the number of members of the association, is approximately 8500 worker pr occupational hygienist.

This place Norway among the top countries in the world, however the numbers are still considered to be too low to contribute to ensure sufficient protection of the workers.